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Message Text

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ACTION ACDA-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 1692

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MARR, AS, PARM, XO
SUBJECT: INDIAN OCEAN ARMS LIMITATION TALKS

1. IN SEPARATE DISCUSSIONS OVER THE LAST TWO WEEKS, RENOUF'S DESCRIPTION OF "CANBERRA TRYING TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO" ABOUT TAKING UP THE U.S. OFFER OF "TECHNICAL DISCUSSIONS" OR "EXPERTS CONSULTATIONS" ON THE INDIAN OCEAN HAS BEEN AMPLY CONFIRMED.

2. GOA'S BASIC PROBLEM IS THAT WHILE IT IS VERY GRATEFUL FOR THE DEGREE AND EXTENT TO WHICH USG HAS KEPT IT INFORMED ABOUT DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SOVIETS ON THE INDIAN OCEAN, IT HAS STILL NOT DECIDED UPON SPECIFICS OF ITS OWN VIEWS AND (AND IT'S A BIG "AND") IT IS STRAPPED FOR MANPOWER IN TRYING TO DECIDE WHO TO SEND TO WASHINGTON FOR FURTHER CONSULTATIONS. IT IS IN THE THROES OF PUTTING TOGETHER AN INTERDEPARTMENTAL PAPER SORTING OUT ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE INDIAN OCEAN, AND DOESN'T KNOW WHETHER IT SHOULD TALK TO THE USG FIRST, OR CONTINUE TRYING TO GET ITS OWN VIEWS IN ORDER BEFORE GOING TO WASHINGTON.

3. WITH RESPECT TO SUBSTANCE, WE DON'T BELIEVE THE GOA
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WOULD TRY TO KIBBITZ ON ISSUES WHERE FIRM U.S. POSITIONS HAVE ALREADY BEEN PUT TO THE SOVIETS.
THEY ARE THINKING MORE IN TERMS OF DEFINING BASIC AUSTRALIAN INTERESTS FOR THE U.S.: FOR EXAMPLE, WHAT DO THEY MEAN WHEN THEY TALK ABOUT EXERCISES OFF THEIR WEST COAST -- DO THEY MEAN TWICE A YEAR; FOUR TIMES A YEAR; OUT TO TWO HUNDRED MILES; WITH WHAT SORT OF SHIPS, WHAT COMPOSITION.

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HOW DO THE COCOS ISLANDS FIGURE INTO THEIR CALCULATIONS OF "AUSTRALIAN WATERS" IN WHICH THEY MIGHT WANT TO HAVE JOINT US-AUSTRALIAN NAVAL EXERCISES? WHAT IS THEIR POSITION WITH RESPECT TO LAND-BASED STRIKE AIRCRAFT; WHAT SORT OF LATITUDE DO THEY BELIEVE IS ULTIMATELY NECESSARY FOR THEM (AND FOR US IN TERMS OF OUR ANZUS COMMITMENTS) OR THEIR OWN CONTINENTAL DEFENSE? WE HAVE MADE CLEAR THAT WE (EMBASSY) ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO SUGGEST TOPICS TO THEM, AND THAT THE APPROPRIATE LOCUS FOR SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS IS WASHINGTON -- A VIEW WE KNOW THE DEPARTMENT SHARES.

4. AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS CLEAR TO US THAT DFA IN STRUGGLING WITH THE ISSUES BELIEVES IT HELPFUL TO BOUNCE THE POINT OF SENDING INSTRUCTIONS TO RENOUF. FOR THAT REASON, DEPARTMENT'S EFFORTS TO KEEP US FILLED IN ARE PARTICULARLY APPRECIATED, AND SERVE A REINFORCING ROLE IN HELPING THE GOA SORT ITS THOUGHTS OUT.

5. WITH RESPECT TO "EXPERTS CONSULTATIONS", IT APPEARS THAT THE GOA IS NOW TOYING WITH THE IDEA OF SENDING AN OFFICER OR TWO FROM DFA, AND PERHAPS TWO OR THREE FROM ADOD, TO JOIN THOSE AT THEIR EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON WHO ARE MUCH MORE FAMILIAR WITH THE DETAILS OF THE DISCUSSIONS THUS FAR. FYI, PERSONNEL CHANGES IN DFA HAVE LEFT THEM BEREFT OF EXPERTISE, AND THEY HAVE ONLY ONE OFFICER CONFIDENTIAL

LOOKING AFTER AN ENTIRE RANGE OF INDIAN OCEAN/JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES/NPW VISITS/AND OTHER POL-MIL MATTERS. HE HAS JUST ARRIVED BACK IN CANBERRA AFTER AN OVERSEAS ASSIGNMENT IN MOSCOW (JOHN BURGESS, BY NAME) AND WE ARE DOING THE BEST WE CAN TO HELP BRING HIM TO SPEED. WE BELIEVE BURGESS WOULD BE THE LOGICAL DFA PARTICIPANT IN "EXPERTS CONSULTATIONS", BUT SHOULD CAUTION THAT HE'S NEW TO THIS AREA. HE'S ALSO IN A DIFFICULT JOB WITH NO STAND-IN IN SIGHT -- SO DFA WILL HAVE TO THINK TWICE BEFORE THEY LET HIM LEAVE FOR A WEEK. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF NO ONE FROM DFA CAN GO, WE ARE NOT SURE IT WOULD BE WORTH TRYING TO CONDUCT SUCH "CONSULTATIONS" WITH JUST ADOD PARTICIPANTS.

6. IN SHORT, WHILE U.S. OFFER TO CONSULT IN WASHINGTON HAS BEEN GREATLY (AND GRATEFULLY) APPRECIATED BY THE GOA, IT IS IN A BIT OF A BIND. IT DOESN'T WANT TO APPEAR DISINTERESTED (WHICH IT DEFINITELY IS NOT), BUT IT'S NOT REALLY IN THE BEST POSITION TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE U.S. OFFER AT THIS TIME. WE DO EXPECT, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOA WILL TRY TO PUT ITS SUBSTANTIVE POSITIONS TO US IN THE RELATIVELY NEAR FUTURE, FOR IT KNOWS THAT

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THIS INTERREGNUM BEFORE THE TALKS WITH THE SOVIETS RESUME
IS PROBABLY THE BEST CHANCE IT WILL EVER HAVE OF GETTING
AN AUSTRALIAN POSITION THROUGH WHILE NEGOTIATIONS ARE
STILL IN FLUX.
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